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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that there must be opportunities for students to pursue recreational reading in a developmental reading program. Some of the considerations suggested for teachers of reading who want to encourage their students to read for recreation include relieving some of the pressures under which many students are forced to operate, knowing the students well enough to provide the needed stimuli that will generate concern and motivate the students to want to read, setting realistic expectations for the students, using instructional material that is intended to accomplish an educational objective, and allowing the students to participate in the construction of learning materials. (WR)

THREE R'S: WHY NOT 'READING, RELAXATION AND RECREATION'?

by

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Slim, of Gasoline Alley, was going to spend a week's vacation at a mountain cabin, with his trusty TV, forgetting that there would be no electrical supply. Clovia asked if he had thought to bring any books. "Books!" he exclaimed! "I haven't read one of those since high school!"

What a sad commentary on that portion of our adult population whose interests in books and reading were stifled by "having to read" or whatever circumstances tended to relegate reading to the lowest of priorities.

In 1966, in a selected study, MacDonald found that first graders preferred reading over all other school subjects; but by the upper grades this preference had vanished (MacDonald, 1966)!

Florence Cleary (1972) reported a study in which 52% of a fifth-grade population assigned reading <u>last place</u> as leisure-time preference. However, the author was able to report that after an experimental reading guidance program, (whose aim was to increase reading interest and skill), 26% listed <u>TV</u> as first or second choice (compared with 64% before the study) and 42% ranked <u>reading</u> as their first or second choice of leisure-time activities. The motivation the participants received during their library periods to read and to pursue voluntarily all types of creative reading and related projects accounted for the drastic shift in their leisure-time preferences.

Albert Harris, in the company of other reading specialists, identifies the components of a good school reading program as (1) Developmental - in which the students learn to read, (2) Functional - in which the students read to learn, and (3) Recreational - that reading which consists of activities which have enjoyment, entertainment, and appreciation as major purposes. (Harris, 1970 p. 8)

It is the major thrust of this presentation to emphasize the recreational aspects of a reading program. In order to underscore this emphasis, it may be necessary to deal with another component identified in the title of this presentation - Relaxation.

The kindergarten and first-grade teacher is familiar with the "rest mat" and the value it provides by giving the primary student that much-needed moment of relaxation, (not to mention the teacher's momentary respite.) Though all teachers may not have a "sleepy-time," or "heads-on-desks" or rest-mat time of inactivity, every teacher knows the relief and release experienced by students at recess time. A time of relaxation - yes! Relaxation from the tensions of mental exertion, by diversion of energies to strenuous physical pursuits.

This is the point I hope to stress - the value of relaxing the pressures under which students may operate, which may serve to frustrate them, to stifle their interests, and to force them into other, more personally satisfying pursuits.

If we may become aware of some of the ways in which students feel frustrated - the tremendous pressures under which some students are forced to operate - then the teacher is in a much better position to teach effectively and help students learn more efficiently by serving to relieve some of the

students' pressures.

However, to set things in proper perspective and maintain some balance, it should be noted that "pressure", per se, is not all bad - nor is it wise to remove all anxiety from students. In her perceptive observations of children, and her analyses of motivation and learning theory, Dr. Madeline Hunter has noted that anxiety is a significant factor in motivation, anxiety being defined as a matter of "concern" for the learning task, but not as a matter of, or to the extent of frustration and desperation. When a student is forced to divert energies to relieving tension, rather than to the task about which he is concerned, the operational definition of anxiety has changed and the role is no longer that of motivation. For effective learning and retention, there needs to be some concern - (anxiety, if you please) - rather than a sterile learning environment of indifference and unconcern, or the hostile environment of anxiety that may be defined as frustration. (Hunter, 1972)

This borders on another of Dr. Hunter's components of motivation - "pleasant feeling tones." Children can learn BEST when they can feel good about themselves and their learning. However, we must all admit that (1) not all the world - nor the world of education and learning - is pleasant all of the time, and (2) we have all, at some time, learned some good lessons through painful and unpleasant experiences. Effective motivation prescribes "pleasant feelings" as the best circumstances for learning. However, unpleasant circumstances are not the worst! Surprisingly, children will learn more in the face of some unpleasant circumstances than in that bland, sterile vacuum of no feelings at all! Who learned with a shrug of the shoulder or with that indifferent "I don't care!"?

All this is to say that the best learning occurs with pleasant feelings

and an apt anxiety that is equivalent to a healthy concern for the task. However, no anxiety and no feeling at all is worse than some unpleasantness and the frustrations of some pressures. It takes a sensitive and a perceptive teacher to provide the proper balance.

It becomes a part of the teachers' task, as he or she attempts to meet the needs of students, to KNOW them - well enough to provide the needed stimuli that will generate concern - motivate - and to remove and relieve these excessive pressures and frustrations which demand energies that could have been directed to learning. Analogous perhaps to working in the cold: If you are dressed for the weather, you may be productive in some rather severe temperatures - but you won't get much work done if your energies are directed toward the more basic need of keeping warm.

It is best to try to help students relax.

Therefore, what are some of those areas with which we need to be concerned about the pressures under which students operate?

First, those difficult decisions of curricular placement, in terms of a child's experience and potential. What he has experienced might be called "knowledge", whereas his potential is directed toward the future in "learning." If the child is "mismatched" to any extent, he becomes bored with previous mastery or frustrated with tasks for which he has not developed prerequisite skills. This establishes the need for a teacher having some expertise in educational assessment - evaluation - diagnosis - remediation - instructional strategies - and individualization, if this source of frustration is to be relieved. The pressures that derive from unrealistic expectations, whether imposed through ignorance or carelessness, deliberately or inadvertently, by

the teacher or by the student or by the parents, may seriously impede a student's effective learning.

It has been long known that grades are not very effective motivators. For some students, perhaps, but for many, the norm-referenced evaluative measures put the child on a treadmill whose pace is always set too fast - in a race in which he can never expect to place first.

If a child can be measured, not against his peers, but against his own record and his own potential, there is tapped a source of motivation that is intrinsic, and may well be intense, the force of which may be directed toward learning rather than relieving the pressures of frustrating impossibilities.

Some areas of life, and of education, may provide a suitable arena for competition, but pity the poor child who must always bear the burden of pressure that comes from having to compete, but never being able to excel. There is no wonder he wants to be a "lion" once, having always played the part of the consumed Christian! The perceptive teacher may rectify this situation in several ways: (1) by measuring the child's performance against his own ability and potential, (2) in the use of criterion-reference evaluation measures rather than norm-referenced measures, (3) individualization of instruction, to meet the needs of individual students, or (4) even assuring that the child gets to enter a race in which he has a good chance of winning, if competition is not to be eliminated or avoided.

The needs of our students are different. The wise teacher knows and respects this, but the BEST teacher helps her students know and respect this. A guest on our Springfield campus told of a visit to a second-grade room. His tour-guide was a little girl who carefully and with great delight explained everything about the room. The visitor noted a line drawn across the floor

on one side of the room and asked his young guide "And what is this?" The child knowingly and kindly replied that beyond that line lay the "Valley of Silence." "What is the Valley of Silence?" the visitor asked. "Oh, you see, some boys and girls can't learn where it is noisy, so we have a Valley of Silence where they can go and there nobody bothers them! Sometimes even the teacher goes there!" How marvelous that not only was the teacher aware of individual needs and differences, but had developed in her students an awareness and a compassion for those differences!

Perhaps a part of the same problem, along with the pressures of competition, is the pressure of conformity. I have a brief film that says more in 3 minutes about conformity than I could say. (Square Education)

How closely this depicts your efforts to enforce conformity will be for you to decide, but the lesson is there, and for the students the pressure is there! After all, keeping up with the Joneses doesn't suppose that all the Joneses are grown-up!

There has been an increasing awareness of the affective dimensions of reading instruction. Students learn to read - and read to learn - but they should not, all the while, be learning to hate reading!

A student in graduate school wanted to know what he could do to help his first-grade daughter with her reading. He indicated that they sat down after dinner every evening for him to help her with her reading. She had been informed that she was going to read - tears or no tears! How tragic! What feelings about reading was this little girl building?

On the other hand, the two little boys were observed leaving their classroom, and one was overheard to comment about his teacher, "Have you noticed the sneaky way she has of making it all seem like fun?"

School is not all fun and games - any more than life is all sunshine and roses. But we treasure the warmth of the sun, and delight in the fragrance of the roses. Why can't we grant that all learning does not have to be painful?

This brings me to the point of this presentation which deals with that third dimension of the reading program - recreational reading. These three areas are not necessarily discrete, nor mutually exclusive. But the "fun" should not be taken from reading!

From an academic point of view, the Recreational Reading Program is defined by Dr. Harris as:

DEVELOPMENT OF INTEREST IN READING

Enjoyment of reading as a voluntary leisure-time activity
Skill in selecting appropriate reading matter for oneself
Satisfaction of present interests and tastes through reading

IMPROVEMENT AND REFINEMENT OF READING INTERESTS

Development of more varied reading interests
Development of more mature reading interests
Achievement of personal development through reading

REFINEMENT OF LITERARY JUDGMENT AND TASTE

Establishment of differential criteria for fiction and non-fiction, prose and poetry, and drama
Development of appreciation for style and beauty of language
Learning to seek for deeper symbolic messages (Harris, 1970 p. 10)

Miles Zintz talks about recreational reading as (1) a free-time activity (2) locating books of interest in the library, (3) developing tastes for a variety of reading materials, (4) giving pleasure to others through oral reading, and (5) fixing permanent habits of reading every day (Zintz, 1970).

Almost every college text or book that treats of reading methods has suggestions for developing reading interests. Such lists include providing

plenty of good books on a variety of subjects; display books colorfully; give pupils ample time for browsing and voluntary reading; be a teacher who reads!; read often to children; encourage children to share their reading; maintain a reading center; use paperbacks in the classroom; to which Charles Walcutt (1967) adds library interests and activities; and Helen Huus (1967) adds various reading activities, such as reading designs. Dr. F. B. May (1973) prescribes an extensive list of oral projects, drama projects, written projects, arts and crafts projects, and demonstration projects.

I would like to share with you briefly a strategy that I recommend to my students - in fact, I require of them as an assignment in my reading classes. The use of teacher-made games and aids in reading instruction. There are games available commercially, but there are also a few simple rules that can be observed to allow teachers to develop their own games for instructional purposes.

I have arbitrarily defined aids as "that which the TEACHER might use to enhance instruction of a concept or a skill."

A game is defined as "that which the STUDENTS might use to enhance learning a skill or a concept." To aid students in the development of this assignment, I have set up 4 criteria: First, the game must be perceived as "fun" - not just another assignment. You can't legislate enjoyment by saying to your kids, "You are going to have fun, even if it kills you!" They must perceive the game as fun.

But kids enjoy many things - bugs, dirt, fights, etc. Therefore, this must be something that is fun, but also accomplishes some educational objective. Otherwise, it has no value in this context of reading instruction.

Perhaps you could stop here and have some good games, but I have required two other criteria of my students for their assignment. The game must be self-instructional - something the kids can do on their own without the

teacher's direct supervision or control. Second, it must be structured in such a way that it is self-correctional. That is, a student must have some way of knowing if his choice or response is right or wrong. Borrowing from the field of programmed instruction, there need to be small-step increments of learning, with immediate knowledge of results, and provisions for branching and/or recycling to correct errors and meet deficiencies.

These criteria make the game more difficult to construct, but much more valuable to the teacher and to the student.

In order to meet these criteria, it would help to understand the game structure of which we speak.

GAME STRUCTURE

1. THE STUDENT'S TASK

   a. Question to answer
   b. Skill to demonstrate
   c. Task to accomplish
   (The Objective - Ends)

2. RESPONSE OPPORTUNITY

   a. Make a prescribed move
   b. Choose an alternative
   c. Create a response
   (Activity - Means)

3. CHECK FOR ACCURACY

   (Evaluation)

There are simulation games, of which Twelker has written in his Guide to Simulation Games for Education and Training (1970). There are competitive skill games, of which Mulac writes in Educational Games for Fun (1971). And there are combinations of simulation and skill games, illustrated by some of these I have shown.

Whether you make your own games, let the students make them, or use commercially produced educational games; whether you employ the teachers' manuals in using supplementary activities or exercise your own creativity; - however

you go about the matter, you need not sacrifice the quality of your instruction to let your students enjoy their learning - and to the extent that you relieve their pressures and frustrations and let them divert their energies to learning - (they may even enjoy it) - you likely will have increased your effectiveness as a teacher!

Dr. Betts has noted the significance of the relaxation of tensions and pressures in speech education, having noted the effect of pressure upon stuttering and spastic speech (1954). Is there likely any less detriment in reading instruction, since many physiological processes are affected by tension?

"Are we trying too hard?" Some answer "Yes". Perhaps our kids are up-tight because we are up-tight and there is no fun in what we do! Someone said to a group of teachers, "If you aren't absolutely exhausted by 4:00 on Friday, you are stealing your money." I might add that if you don't enjoy what you do - (and if your kids don't enjoy it) - you might be in the wrong job.

I have chuckled at Dr. Ira Aaron's reference to what he has called the "cockroach" method of teaching reading. Of the cockroach, he said, "It is not what he can carry off - it is what he falls in and messes up!"

Let's not mess it up for kids who can learn to read - and enjoy it!

THE END

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